

The Pandemic of Bullying in Mexico: Urgent Social Policies

Juan Antonio Vega Báez

This article delves on the social statistics which prove that school violence has become pandemic in elementary and secondary schools, at the same time expounding on the main policies and programs which aim to confront the phenomenon.



Foto: Lenin Ocampo / La Jornada.

ABSTRACT

In a context of increasing criminal violence and operations against criminality in México, since 2007, the primary and secondary schools have suffered an "invasion" caused by a boom of real, discursive and symbolic violence. This article explores the national social data, confirming that school violence and, specifically, bullying has a pandemic dimension in secondary schools and is epidemic at primary schools. Here we summarize the principal programs and policies implemented to respond to this situation, assessing the accomplishments of the international obligations for the protection of children and adolescents against violence by the

Mexican state, from a viewpoint of human and social rights. It concludes underlining the urgent measures for strategic change, in order to accomplish integral social prevention of bullying.

Key words: School violence, bullying, social policies, social prevention, children's rights.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying, generally known in Spanish as school harassment, is a conceptual construct which originated in the industrialized countries who nearly three decades ago began describing the phenomenon of abusive or stigmatizing use of power in relations between actors in the school sphere, especially among peers (Olweus, 1998; and his pioneering study, 1984). It is a type of school violence.

Meanwhile, school violence is understood as "violence against children in schools and other educational environs" according to the World Report on Violence against children of the Secretary General of the United Nations (Pinheiro, 2006, 116-126), which integrated school harassment as a category for analysis for all regions of the planet, which has legitimized its universal use. With this bullying joins the rest of the categories which today make up the main forms of violence in educational environments, institutions or spheres: physical and psychological punishment; discrimination and gender based violence; sexual violence based on gender; physical fights and aggression; homicide and lesions; and violence with arms.

As a social problem, bullying forms part of the continuum of school violence and social violence. In this regard, the child and adolescent population in school environments in Mexico has directly or indirectly suffered from the explosion of criminal violence and its excessive combat in public spaces, a strategy favored by the federal administration in Mexico in the framework of the Alliance for the Security and Prosperity in North America (ASPAN or TLCAN II) and the Merida Initiative. While this phenomenon which disrupts the social fabric has gotten worse and worse, since 2007 when the first surveys on the Mexican school system were made on information in schools, there has been a great prevalence of school harassment.

Up until the middle of the past decade, the information available in the country did not reflect a distressing situation with regard to violence, to such a degree that it was not considered a relevant matter in the National Report on Violence and Health. (Ministry of Health, 2006) This situation is contrary to the perception of a medium or high profile which the media and public institutions have given to the matter of bullying during the present decade.¹

1 An example is the initiative of the Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination) and Channel 22 of Mexico, through the broadcasting of "Nosotros... los otros" (We...the others) in 2012: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTVegSdy7ks>



Measuring violence in Mexican school is a very recent practice and the data is, in general, distressing, but it is not yet reflected in the national and international agenda of the rights of children and adolescents in Mexico (Arteaga, Méndez Couto and Muñoz, 2012, 150-159).²

In view of this paradox, the present article endeavors to answer the following questions:

- Is it possible to show that bullying be considered a social epidemic, based on

the criteria of the World Health Organization?

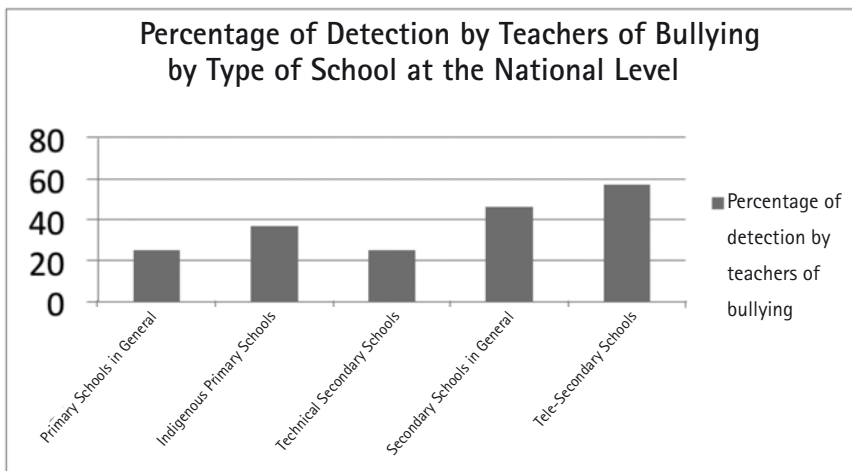
- Does the profile of the social policies implemented by the Mexican State to answer this refer to reactive and securitizing insight into school relations and spaces?
- How can one move to the paradigm of social prevention while focusing on human rights and social participation in schools?

MEASURING A SOCIAL EPIDEMIC WITH PANDEMIC TENDENCIES

In the study called Primer Informe Nacional sobre Violencia de Género en la Educación Básica en México (First National Report on Gender violence in Basic Education in Mexico) (2010, 98), 43.2% of teachers at the national level answered that they had detected cases of bullying in their schools.

² Despite the importance of the comparative regional study on violence against children, public entities and civic organizations of Mexico who participated in the process and contributed data from the Encuentro y Mapeo Centroamericano contra la Violencia a Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes de 2011 (Central American Meeting and Mapping against Violence to Children and Adolescents of 2011), they did not manage to have the data and national relevance of bullying reflected, nor other problems such as child labor of nearly 3 million children, in the face of the problematic axis which reflect the chapter on Mexico: armed violence, trafficking and migration of unaccompanied minors.

Figure 1. Percentage of detection by teachers of bullying by type of school at the national level (2010).



Source-my own elaboration based on the First National Report on Gender Violence in Basic education in Mexico, SEP-UNICEF, 2010, page 98

Said report (see Figure 1) shows differences among bullying detected by teachers at each level and type of educational institution. In the elementary school sphere, the positive detection in primary schools in general was one in four (25.4%), and detection in indigenous primary schools was one in three (36.9%). At the secondary school level the figures were two out of three (57.5%) in tele-secondary schools, followed by secondary schools in general with 46.4% and technical secondary schools with 25.4%, the lowest detected level of bullying.

Likewise, the Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (National Institute for Educational Evaluation) (INEE, 2007) published a study on perception of students of basic education. Contrary to the tendencies reported by teachers in the SEP-UNICEF study, the INEE stresses that primary school students refer to more violence than those in secondary school. The

schools that stand out in this respect are Indigenous primary schools (institutions with lax discipline, in general) and private secondary schools (institution with rigid discipline, in general). Among the most outstanding confirmations we find that:

- Boys, girls and adolescents who have been victims of physical violence by one or more classmates are 17% in primary schools and 14.1% in secondary schools.
- The proportions of students who are butts of constant mockery are 24.2% in primary schools and 13.6% in secondary schools.
- Two out of ten students in primary and one out of ten in secondary schools confessed to having taken part in fights in which blows were reached within the school.

Figure 2. Classification of Federative Entities by the their average of school violence in secondary schools (2008)



Source-Taken from REDIM (2010), Violence against children and adolescents in México. Regional views. Thematic essay Children Count in México 2010. Network for children's rights in México, based on INEE, 2009



Figure 3. Classification of Federative Entities by their Average of Violence in the Neighborhood of the Secondary Schools (2008).



Source-Taken from REDIM (2010), Violence against children and adolescents in México. Regional views. Thematic essay Children Count in México 2010. Network for children's rights in México, based on INEE, 2009.

- At primary as well as secondary level almost half of the children and adolescents interviewed have had some object or money stolen.
- Adolescents in secondary schools who reported having been threatened represent 13.1% while 2.5% of children in primary school say they are afraid to go to school.

Among the risk factors for bullying detected by INEE (2007) were the increase in levels of violence which included students living in "one parent homes or homes in which the parents were not present, when they perceived that within the home coexistence is conflictive and when the parents do not pay attention to what their children are doing outside of school." Factors such as the family environ, school performance and the social context

where the school is located influence the possibility of acts of violence occurring.³

In another study carried out by INEE (2009), a panorama on the situation of students in secondary schools is painted, in regard to the matter of school violence which, as we have already pointed out, includes bullying, both inside and outside the school, and the way in which coexistence in an unsafe environ tends to hinder teaching-learning processes in Mexico.

This research concluded that among the states with higher than national average perception of school violence were included Chihuahua, Durango, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Michoacán, Jalisco,

³ According to analysis from the legislature, 3 out of every 10 primary school students have received some kind of physical aggression from a classmate, and of these 10% received specialized attention. <http://www.aldf.gob.mx/comsoc-que-ley-contra-bullying-sea-imitada-nivel-nacional--9974.html>

Estado de México, Federal District, Tabasco and Quintana Roo (see Figure 2).

The states with the highest levels of violence in the neighborhood of the school are Chihuahua, Sonora, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Estado de México, Federal District and Quintana Roo, that is the Northwestern region and the northern border as well as the Valley of Mexico and Quintana Roo (see Figure 3).

Can it be said then that school harassment is a pandemic in Mexico? In the present section we have made a quick presentation of the demographic-educational geographic distribution of various kinds of school harassment and violence by level and type of school, just as is recommended by an epidemiologist from a social perspective. In this regard, in public health the term pandemic applies to an "epidemic extended over many of the countries and which attacks almost all individuals in a country" (an epidemic being a disease which attacks a great number of people at the same time and in the same country or region).⁴

The conclusion is that harassment, as one of the forms of school violence, is a widely extended practice in over half of the school population polled in secondary schools, specifically in tele-secondary schools where it may be considered a "social pandemic", ac-

cording to the criteria used by the Pan American Health Organization (1997). In the rest of secondary schools in general and in Indigenous primary schools it is present as a kind of "social epidemic" affecting many of the members of the school communities at these levels and in these sectors. On the national average, according to reports by teachers, it is a phenomenon with epidemic features, without counting the measurements of cyber harassment or cyberbullying.

Geographically speaking, school violence is a phenomenon associated with the federative entities with the largest percentage of urban population, in the center as well as in the north of the country, especially for violence reported inside schools.

However, more quantitative and qualitative studies⁵ need to be made on the impact of bullying on the Mexican school population, at the personal as well as the educational group level, from a multi-level, multi-sectorial and also multi-regional perspective. In this regard, among the results of comparative research carried out by Román and Murillo (2011, 37), with data from 16 Latin American countries⁶ (see Table 1), the

5 We suggest you consult recent qualitative studies compiled by Educación para el Niño Callejero (Education for Children in the Street) IAP (EDNICA), which appeared in 2012 in Rayuela, *Revista Iberoamericana sobre Niñez y Juventud en Lucha por sus Derechos*, (Rayuela, Ibero American Magazine on Childhood and Youth in the Fight for their Rights) #6, dedicated to the subject of "School Violence".

6 The authors showed results for Mexico, except for the adjustment for mistreatment in school performance, since

4 Based on the concept set down in the *Diccionario Enciclopédico de Medicina* (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Medicine) (1986), JIMS.



<http://aristeginoticias.com/>



Table 1. Percentage of students in 6th grade of Primary school who say they know someone in their class who has been the victim of robbery, insults, threats or beatings in school over the past month, in 16 Latin American countries (2011).

Country	Robbery	Insults or Threats	Beat or Harm	Some episode of violence ^a
Argentina	53,60	49,61	50,23	74,67
Brasil	45,89	36,89	42,27	67,04
Colombia	58,60	33,21	38,29	72,83
Chile	42,04	29,69	25,13	57,36
Cuba	12,07	73,38	7,42	16,25
Costa Rica	63,34	47,67	48,25	78,56
Ecuador	53,25	33,67	38,95	65,99
El Salvador	41,92	24,29	31,52	55,21
Guatemala	43,21	24,93	31,58	57,66
Mexico	47,19	32,88	33,98	56,88
Nicaragua	60,55	39,95	47,08	63,87
Panamá	47,64	36,88	38,57	73,99
Paraguay	38,43	29,37	31,73	63,41
Peru	49,40	42,68	42,16	56,00
Dominican Republic	46,55	35,41	38,79	69,98
Uruguay	45,56	45,49	42,98	60,08
<i>Total Latin America^b</i>	<i>46,72</i>	<i>35,74</i>	<i>38,91</i>	<i>62,42</i>
<i>Average Paises</i>	<i>46,82</i>	<i>34,37</i>	<i>36,80</i>	<i>62,24</i>

Source: Roman and Murillo (2011, 45)

Percentage of students who say they know someone in their class who has been the victim of mistreatment (regardless of the type) in school over the past month.

Results for all of Latin American obtained through the adjustment of results by country.

conclusion was that at the individual level "students who suffered from peer violence had a significantly lower level in Reading and Math than those who did not undergo any violence." Also at the group level "in the classrooms where there was more verbal and physical violence, students showed worse performance than in classrooms where there was less violence."

HUMAN RIGHTS OF LIFE FREE OF VIOLENCE IN EDUCATION

The right of children and adolescents for protection against violence is a right acknowledged by various article of the the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Especially, protection against violence in the rights of education, the CRC explicitly points out that "States Parties to the present shall take all

appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention."⁷ This last expression, "in conformity with the present Convention" is an implicit remark of other concurrent obligations which may be applied in the environment of the right to education as protection "against torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Art. 37), "against physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse" (Art. 19) and against any form of sexual and economic exploitation (Arts. 32-36).

Likewise, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICE-SCR), adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on December 16, 1966 and which took ef-

this questionnaire has not been given to the families yet (Román and Murillo, 2011, 38)

⁷ Article 28, second paragraph of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

fect a decade later (January 3, 1976) in Article 13 and 14 recognize the right of all people to education, a right to which should be applied the principle of non-discrimination, in order to assure its equal implementation, formal as well as substantive.⁸

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms[...] education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups[...]⁹
In its doctrine, the ICESCR

Committee in its doctrine deals with the right to protection against violence and school harassment,¹⁰ defining the incompatibility of physical punishment and humiliation with human dignity and asking to eradicate all sexual and other types of stereotypes. In addition, since the right to education is applied in the 4 common features of the ICESCR, protection against violence in education should be equally available, accessible, acceptable and top-quality.

While the Committee for Child's Rights, in its first observation, showed that the States should provide protection against harassment by peers, pointing out that the state's omission in this respect may bring about the negation of the exercising its own right.

Therefore, as a human social right, the right to protection against violence in the context of the right to education implies

obligations of execution or promotion (at the level of compliance as well as results), the same as respect and protection due to its containing elements of a right to immediate realization, on protection of personal integrity. Thus, starting from this multidimensional wealth, the difficulty of placing this right in the obsolete scheme of the three generations is confirmed. Therefore compliance demands the implementation of social policies as well as mechanisms of state protection, which would allow the subjects access to the right of conditions of protection, prevention and purveyance.

In the case of México, there is a regulatory Ley para la Protección de los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes (Law for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents) from the year 2000, which combines the language of rights (formal) with a welfare type institutionalization prior to the Convention, called the Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (National System for the Integral Development of the Family) (DIF). In Article 32 this law lays down that children and adolescents have the right to an education which respects their dignity. It also indicates that laws should provide the measures necessary to prevent, in educational institutions, measures of discipline which are contrary to the dignity of the child or his or her physical or mental integrity.

Nevertheless, the Ley General de Educación (General Law of Education) (1993) makes no reference to school violence nor does it provide sanctions for teachers who practice aggression, nor does it refer to violence among peers, nor the way to prevent or remedy it. This has been pointed out as a central omission in said law, as if school violence did not exist, as if bullying were not truly a pandemic. Corporal punishment in schools has not been abolished de jure

8 ICESCR Committee, General Observation No. 20, Non-discrimination and the ICESCR, July 2, 2009.

9 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13, Paragraph 1.

10 General Observation No. 13, The Right to Education, 1999. The ICESCR Committee took into account the interpretation of the Committee for the Rights of Children and the Committee for Human Rights, Article 7 of the ICCPR.



nor de facto, the latter by way of sanctions in specific cases. That is why Mexico is considered to be a country with a lax legal framework which encourages impunity of violence committed in schools, as has been confirmed by the *Iniciativa Global para Eradicar el Castigo Corporal Infantil* (Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children) (2011).

Since Mexico is a federalist country, all 32 states have relative legislative autonomy which limits making the application of the Law for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents obligatory. The wording of this Law does not specify the guarantor, nor define mechanisms which are autonomous, yet effective, beyond welfare, and this has limited the writing of local laws for effectively protecting children and adolescents. That is to say, there is no ombudsman for children's rights.

However, there is a precedent of at least four outstanding local legislatures which expressly forbid school violence committed by the personnel of educational institutions. In Sonora, the *Ley de Educacion del Estado* (State Law of Education) (1998) forbids people who work in educational services from violating the physical, mental or moral integrity of their students. Despite this, there has been a serious case of administrative negligence stemming from the collective death of students in a day care center subrogated to private citizens by the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (Mexican Institute of Social Security).

The other cases are the state of Jalisco (2012), Nayarit and the Federal District (2011) who over the last few years have passed local legislation which regulates school coexistence, takes preventive measures and sanctions violence and bullying. I will expressly refer to the latter case and describe the sanctions foreseen by the former.

On February 1, 2012, the *Ley de Promoción de la Convivencia Libre de Violencia en el Entorno Escolar* (Law for Promoting Coexistence Free from Violence in the School Environment) went into effect. This law means to integrally combat various types of school violence, including so-called bullying, in the Mexican capital, specifically in the territory of the Federal District.

This measure will lead to changing the rights of students to a life free of violence in the school environment, to an enforceable right, demanding denunciation with direct application of the law and sanctions, contrary to what happens in most dimensions of the rights to education. In this case the acts or omissions, related to violence, by school personnel are punishable. In this respect the recent reforms in Jalisco point out that

[...]are considered offenses of those who render educational services [...] to tolerate conduct which is contrary to coexistence within the school community [...] to not take the necessary measures to attend to and prevent school violence and harassment. For the directors, teachers or support personnel to tolerate or allow the use of obscene, lascivious, blasphemous language, against students, or carry out harassing or violent conduct against students in any way or form. Hide from the parent or guardian conducts which are considered to be school violence or harassment in which their children or pupils may have been involved. Where applicable, provide false information or hide information to the respective authorities with respect to events to which they have been eyewitnesses.

In spite of this legislative progress, to date (August, 2013) a federal or general law against school violence has yet to be passed in Mexico. This has led to the non-existence of a national policy to prevent and eradicate bullying.

ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS: THE DILEMMAS OF PREVENTION

Following is a brief summary of three of the main bills created in Mexican federal public policies and the Federal District against school harassment, during the 2006-2012 administration.

NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

The National Program for Safe Schools forms part of the national safety strategy, "Limpiemos México" (Let's Clean Up Mexico). In July 2007 it became the governing strategy of the federal government, designed by the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública (Ministry of Public Security), with the subordinated participation of the Secretarías de Educación Pública and of Salud (Ministries of Public Education and Health) who were unable to come up with a national program against childhood violence even though they had signed an international agreement (vid infra). Its discursive objective is to consolidate public schools of basic education as safe and trustworthy spaces with social participation and citizen formation of the students, including the prevention of physical violence and risk behavior among students, especially in towns with the highest levels of criminal incidence. One of the main components of this program, a sub-program called "Operativo mochila segura" (Operation Safe Backpack) (Ministry of Public Security, no date), consisted of carrying out periodic searches of students' briefcases, bags or backpacks, in order to detect and stop the introduction into the schools of "sharp objects, firearms, drugs or toxic substances, aerosol sprays, permanent ink markers or any other object which could be used to draw graffiti, war toys and pornography [...] that could be used to cause damage to, threaten the

physical or moral health of the students" (p. 2), "including clothes which could be changed into in order to not be recognized after committing a crime." (p. 3) On this component, civic human rights organizations defending children pointed out that this was a police strategy, with a repressive focus and not one of citizen safety, disguised as preventative action, which was carried out without any prior diagnoses, with indiscriminate criteria and which favored the criminalization of school violence among peers. (CADHAC, 2009) In a speedy inspection of some pages of local governments, it was verified that, sheltered by this program, each entity of the republic implemented the components with different emphasis, in actions ranging from simulations of arms confrontation to setting up "Safe School" children's choir and training groups of boys and girls as "school police" who guarded against, detected and punished "suspicious" behavior.

SCHOOL PROGRAM, MEDIATION AND JUSTICE

The Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General's Office of the Republic) (PGR) implemented a program in which students would learn to solve conflicts peacefully. The purpose of this program was to develop in students the ability to become aware of the fact that problems may be solved without reproducing patterns of violent conduct, starting with actions focused on the "prevention of the crime" operated by the General Office for the Prevention of Crime and its delegations in the states. Among the central axis of the program is the training of teachers in the development of "citizen responsibility" in secondary school students, as well as turning them into "agents of change and promoters of the culture of justice and me-



diation", along with cultural fairs of justice and mediation.¹¹ In this respect, it seems paradoxical that this initiative with a perspective for developing the capacity for prevention and focusing on juvenile citizen participation, something new in the national administrative culture, should be led by the PGR. Over the last 5 years this institution has opted for using a strategy of reaction-contention in the face of organized crime, with disastrous results in terms of the proliferation of armed criminal gangs which control territories and criminal processes and with limited structural results in terms of impunity which is over 90% at the national level. One might ask whether the focus on "prevention of crime" is compatible with, in this case, the focus on human rights and rights of children and adolescents, specifically.

PROGRAM SCHOOLS WITHOUT VIOLENCE

The Ministry of Education of the Government of the Federal District has carried out the "Schools without Violence" campaign, and in the context of the program emerges the Program "For a Culture of Non-Violence and Good Treatment in the Educational Community" (beginning on August 18, 2010), that is to say, it was initiated before the Law of Coexistence in the School Environment was passed. This program has three lines of action: "Schools without Violence" campaign, Investigation and Attention to schools; which in turn includes various activities whose main objective is to have a bearing on the school atmosphere in the DF, favoring relations based on good treatment and respect for the rights of all

11 See the journalistic note: PGR implementa programa contra la violencia en escuelas (PGR implements program against violence in schools), Source Notimex, February 5, 2012 consulted at en <http://www.aztecanoticias.com.mx/notas/seguridad/94888/pgr-implementa-programa-contra-violencia-en-escuelas>, 08/31/2013

Photo: José Alvarado, El Mercurio.

members of the educational community. This preventive program is aimed at raising awareness and the development of the capacities of school actors, including students, in detecting and impacting, with complementary institutional support on the attention and derivation of cases in the inter-institutional network.



Two out of ten Primary School Students and one out of ten Secondary School Students say they have participated in fights within their schools.

A general comment on the programs which confront school violence, in the specific context of Mexico, we must remember that the previous federal government elevated the priority of focusing on contention and combat, in detriment to prevention, in parallel and coherent with its "war on drugs", which, as we know, had the support of the United States through the Mérida Ini-

tiative and Fast and Furious. Both of these programs provided training and financial support in equipment and legal (and even illegal) arms, situations which directly impacted on the increase in armed confrontations in school environments in the areas of major conflict between criminal gangs.

The way in which school violence is interpreted by the security system is a vi-



olent/unsafe disruption in the school-environment relationship, through the notion of "school safety" in the face of external actors, thus preventing or limiting treating the Intra-school factors and actors involved in reproducing violent relations. This is the predominating perspective in national programs such as "Safe Schools" which have favored a criminalizing or potential criminal contamination approach in reference to students. This perspective has been reinforced through political discourse and the social representation of violence of the duopoly of Mexican television, in favor of militarization of public safety.

In the face of this reinforced federal policy of totalizer and subordinate tendencies in educational policies, the news that the Secretaría de Salud (Ministry of Health) (SS) is drawing up a national program against violence in childhood and adolescence would seem to be a joke in very bad taste, despite the fact that this commitment has been signed between the SS, SEP, federal DIF (vid infra), with the backing of UNICEF and in the presence of the author of the World Report of the U.N., Paulo Sergio Pinheiro.

This political defeat of the preventive paradigm of the federal government in the face of the securitization of the agenda on violence and school violence has only been compensated by some local and sectorial initiatives against bullying, but without any impact on the structural factors operating both inside and outside schools.

SCHOOL ACTORS IN THE FACE OF EPIDEMIC-PANDEMIC HARASSMENT

The Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Union of Education Workers) (SNTE), the largest labor union in Latin America, has not been the actor most

interested in including in its agenda of priorities protection against school harassment, as can be seen on its webpage "SNTE para los niños",¹² (SNTE for Children). The website does not include any recommendations for preventing or solving bullying in the section "Cuida ty salud" (Caring for your health), nor in the section "Protección civil: cuídate" (Civic Protection: Take care of yourself), and with very limited mention of "El derecho del niño a la integridad física y emocional" (the right of the child to physical and emotional integrity). One reason, among others, for this omission is the differences in criteria with which different state sections have dealt with the multiplicity of forms of school violence, including the cases of mistreatment and abuse by teachers. In this regard, no one can deny that teachers are part of the solution, when they have received adequate training in detecting and channeling cases of bullying. This is why it is urgent to multiply the clear position of teachers on the prevention and eradication of all forms of violence, including harassment among peers and harassment and discrimination by teachers.

With respect to elementary and middle school education, students have no space for expression nor representation within the school community, due to the non-inclusive character of the mechanisms for decision making in the profile of most Mexican schools, where there are no student representatives, councils or assemblies. This factor of institutional design is the reason boys and girls and adolescents have no formal say in the design of strategies of prevention, detection nor eradication, with the exception of a few pilot programs carried out with the support of civic organizations and with international cooperation.

¹² Based on the analysis of information published on the web page of the SNTE, consulted on August 30, 2013, <http://www.snte.org.mx/chavitos/index.php>

In turn, parents' associations, in which mostly women participate, and which have been a factor in community mobilization for maintenance and improvement of schools and furnishings within them, have obsolete rules which allocate them a subordinate contributory role. An example of this is their use in legitimizing charging complementary school fees or the discretionary use of resources from the school cooperative, limiting their capacity of leadership or initiative in promoting processes of effective participation in solving problems such as violence. The instrumental role given to parents in "operation backpack" (vid supra) for searching children's bags, when these are assigned unilaterally by administrators, represent a limited way of understanding participation in the prevention of school violence.

To make matters worse, we have been able to establish the welfare perspective which prevails in institutions such as the DIF. This institution had a patrimonialist origin during the PRI regimes over the last 70 years, and is generally considered a "ministry of the first lady" of the country, state or town. Its design and mandate are prior to the Convention on Children's Rights and prior to the so-called "democratic transition". This design is in contrast to the power the Law for the Protection of Children's Rights of 2000 brought with it with respect to the protection of children and adolescents against violence and exploitation, through the *Procuraduría de Defensa del Menor y la Familia* (Federal Office for the Defense of Minors and the Family), whose window of opportunity was not taken advantage of to the fullest by the federal governments of democratic alternation (from parties other than the PRI, specifically the PAN), for cementing a system for prevention and justice for children who were victims of or witnesses to violence.

Finally, we cannot forget the flank of civic organizations pro children and adolescents, whose dynamics also passed through hits and misses in relation to the public agenda against child violence, including bullying. For example, when Paulo Sergio Pinheiro witnessed the signing of the Inter-ministerial Agreement for the elaboration of a Nation Program against violence for Children and Adolescents in 2007, civic organizations missed the opportunity to exert pressure for the establishment of a national policy with a committee to follow up the Agreement. The only thing they managed to do was have a high level conversation with the first lady, with whom they began a series of dialogues based on the agenda of the sectorial priorities of the DIF, mainly including the matter of parentless children and adoption, international migration and the return of these children.

Complementary to this, Mexican civic organizations should evaluate whether it is pertinent to sit down at the table to discuss the protocol for protecting boys and girls and adolescents in operations carried out by the armed forces (in schools), in order to alleviate the police-military operations which in one presidential term had left more than 20,000 people missing and about 90,000 executed, including more than one thousand people under 18 years of age, instead of promoting progress in the preventative paradigm from the point of view of children's rights.

Reactivating a possible visit to Mexico by the Representatives of the Secretary General of the U.N. on violence against Children, Mata Santos Pais, and recovering the recommendation of the Committee on Children's Rights of the U.N., in its next revision of Mexico's report on compliance with CDN, may make the difference in reestablishing the public agent focusing on a social view-



point of school violence, which overcomes the temptation of the continuation of short term securitization of public policies.

CONCLUSIONS

School communities, as spaces of social interaction, are not beyond the reach of the "boom" of real, discursive and symbolic violence in which Mexico has been immersed since 2007. According to statistics, beginning in that year bullying or school harassment has acquired a pandemic dimension at secondary school level and an epidemic dimension at the primary level. However, complementary qualitative studies are needed in order to understand the logic of harassment in various region, sectors and levels of schooling.

The lack of a normative framework with which to prevent and eradicate this phenomenon, based on the human rights of children to a life without violence, has been translated into an absence of coherent and efficient public policies for confronting this phenomenon, with the exception of the components underlined in the programs presented here which are consistent with the definition of a diagnosis, the structuring of a strategy to attend to the causes and impacts, as well as counting on the participation of all school actors co-responsibly, including students themselves. The perspective of securitization

from school harassment which prevailed in the hegemonic program up until 2012, "Safe School", only responds in part and on a short term basis to the consequences of school violence, but with the price of taking a police and not social approach to the problem. Therefore, this perspective and this program should be abolished in favor of a real national program for the prevention of, attention to and eradication of school violence, which includes strategies against bullying.

In addition, an attempt must be made by the actors in the executive and legislative branches to begin to abolish all kinds of corporal punishment and harassment in the educational sphere, following the model of progressive laws in the Federal District and Jalisco in favor of peaceful coexistence within the school. However, the profound causes of bullying and other forms of school violence must be attacked, including economic inequality, and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and way of thinking, among others. To this respect, the DIF cannot continue being the low profile ministry of children. It would be better to revert the patrimonialization of the rights of children and nullify the prevailing welfare focus. The change should be made hand in hand with the construction of a new National Institute for Children, with an integral and integrating multi-sectorial social policy of protection and prevention.

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Juan Antonio Vega Báez

Member of the Red Latinoamericana contra la Explotación (Latin American Network against Exploitation), the World Organization Against Torture, and the Niño Callejero (Children of the Street), IAP.